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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ANTANANARIVO 000523

SIPDIS

STATE FOR AF/E - MBEYZEROV

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [MA](#)

SUBJECT: MADAGASCAR: TGV - A HIGH SPEED TRAIN WRECK
ORCHESTRATED BY THE FRENCH?

REF: ANTANANARIVO 511

Classified By: POL/ECON CHIEF DOVIE HOLLAND FOR REASONS 1.4 B AND D.

1. (C) Summary: The Malagasy Permanent Rep to the UN Rajemison -- a former Senate President, former TIKO employee and erstwhile Ravalomanana faithful -- recently returned to Madagascar to moderate the regional conferences organized by the illegal transition government (HAT) with an eye towards advancing his future political career. He presents himself as neutral, although he is increasingly aligned with the HAT and its leader Andry "TGV" Rajoelina. In a July 8 meeting between Rajemison and ousted President Ravalomanana's Foreign Minister Elyett Rasendratsirofo, both agreed that a consensual transition government, with a mandate solely focused on preparing for and organizing elections, should be installed. They agreed that eventual elections should not be rushed, but rather time should be taken to ensure that all of the necessary legal reforms are thoroughly completed beforehand to avoid the elections being subsequently contested. Both expressed their skepticism that a move of the SADC-AU-UN negotiations offshore would be able to break the impasse between Ravalomanana and Rajoelina and his military backers, with Elyett demanding international intervention to stop this coup from benefiting its perpetrators and becoming a precedent for future generations.

In a subsequent meeting, however, Rajemison's adviser explained that the French were prepared to finance a national conference to be held in late July that would likely produce a "consensus" that would leave out Ravalomanana and his supporters and pave the way for rapid elections. Rajemison has not pressured the HAT to alter this plan, and enlisted the USG's support in discouraging Ravalomanana from proclaiming or undertaking a return to Madagascar in the near future. In a separate meeting, the HAT finance minister confirmed that the HAT was growing impatient and was pushing to move straight away to "consensual" elections without signing a transition charter or implementing a consensual transition government. End summary.

2. (C) Malagasy Ambassador to the UN/Geneva Guy Rajemison Rakotomaharo told the Ambassador July 4 that he was working with the Caux Foundation in Switzerland to promote national reconciliation and civic education through a three-phase plan involving training Malagasy participants in Switzerland to disseminate lessons on conflict resolution widely around the island. This process, for which Rajemison requested USG financing, is intended to complement the soon to be relaunched SADC-AU-UN negotiations, he asserted. Rajemison's assistant admitted to Emboff July 9 that the Caux plan was mainly a pretext for their trip to Madagascar to assess the evolution of the political landscape.

13. (C) Rajemison, permanent representative to the UN in Geneva since 2008 and president of the senate from 2002-2008 (when he was ungraciously ousted by Ravalomanana to make room for another crony), is walking a narrow line in an apparent attempt to advance his political career; he is widely seen as a possible consensus presidential candidate. Although previously a close adviser of exiled President Ravalomanana, he is attempting to portray himself as "neutral" in the current context (his demotion last year helps in this regard) and he has taken several large steps toward the Rajoelina/HAT camp. He has stopped short of jumping in fully, however, and refused the HAT's offer to become a vice president. He did accept to return from Geneva to chair the reconciliation committee of the regional conference in the capital area organized by the HAT that ran from June 29 through July 3. He explained that these conferences had not reached any conclusions, but had rather lain the groundwork for the national conference to be held later in July. Discussion covered topics ranging from lower and upper age limits for presidential candidates (30 to 60 was discussed), to the structure of the government (centralized, decentralized, federal), to the terms of amnesty (72% of participants in the capital region favored a selective amnesty that would likely rule out Ravalomanana) (see ref tel on regional conferences for more detail).

14. (C) Rajemison explained that he had been estranged from Ravalomanana, because he had provided him honest advice concerning his entourage and dared to criticize him publicly. He further elaborated in a July 8 meeting, saying that he had been deeply hurt by the TIM party's move to push him

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aside in 2008, when he was left out of the polit bureau and lost the senate presidency. He felt that TIM and Ravalomanana had abandoned him. He said that he had last spoken to the ousted president in April 2008 and now only received direction from the HAT. He was ambivalent regarding Rajoelina's future plans, stating that although Rajoelina had originally said he did not want to be president, he could easily change his mind if he felt that the "people" wanted him to run.

15. (C) Rajemison has held discussions with local pro-Ravalomanana/Legalist leaders and encouraged them to focus on the return to constitutionality and democratic institutions rather than an individual. He agreed with the Ambassador that Ravalomanana's return to Madagascar at this time would have a negative impact on the country, but also expressed concern about the human rights violations, such as arbitrary searches and arrests, being perpetrated by the HAT.

(Note: A potential victim of political arrest, Elyett, is discussed in the following paragraph. She and her husband have been in hiding since she accepted to become Ravalomanana's foreign minister in late April. End note.)

16. (C) In a July 8 meeting between Rajemison and Ravalomanana's Foreign Minister Elyett Rasendratsirofo, both agreed that a consensual transition government, with a mandate solely focused on preparing for and organizing elections, should be installed. They agreed that eventual elections should not be rushed, in contrast to what they viewed as the EU's position, but rather that all of the t's should be crossed and i's dotted -- reformed constitution, independent electoral commission, reformed political parties law and electoral code -- before moving to elections to prevent them from being contested afterwards. They disagreed about how to get to that point, however, with Rajemison arguing against Ravalomanana's return and Elyett insisting that the international community should guarantee the exiled president's safe return and impose a constitutional solution, as the Malagasy parties would not agree to it on their own. She lamented that the international community supported the principles that she was fighting to uphold, but did not provide the means with which to accomplish an extremely difficult return to constitutional order. She pointed out

the HAT's moves over the past months to entrench itself throughout the country by doling out positions and creating vested interests that are now reluctant to cede power. While Elyett and Emboff insisted that a consensual transition government must take Ravalomanana into account, both Elyett and Rajemison were skeptical that a move of SADC-AU-UN negotiations offshore that would allow the ousted president to participate would be feasible. Rajemison indicated that Rajoelina was unlikely to accept such a move. Even if he did, Elyett pointed out that the military elements behind him -- which she adamantly claimed were funded by the French -- would not accept it. (Note: the French have indeed made a public show of their support for the Malagasy military, with the most recent example being the French ambassador's speech last week at a ceremony in which French military officials were decorated by the HAT Minister of Defense who led the coup. End note.)

17. (C) Rajemison's assistant Aro told Emboff June 9 that Rajemison agreed with Elyett's assertion that the French had backed TGV during the coup and continued to do so. He said that the action, at least initially, was driven by wealthy dual nationality Franco-Malgaches who had friends in high places in the French government and were unhappy about Ravalomanana's impingement on their business interests. He explained that Rajemison was being "recruited" by the French government who had met with him several times during his stay in Tana. According to Aro, the French are planning to finance the national conference that the HAT has announced will be held by the end of July and call the results of the unilaterally-organized conference a "consensus". The consensus would almost certainly not take Ravalomanana, nor his close advisers, into account. (Aro explained that the French consider Ravalomanana's cabinet named after the coup, including jailed Prime Minister Manandafy and FM Elyett to be "illegal".) Based on this consensus, the HAT would move ahead with organizing elections.

18. (C) Aro claimed that Rajemison was concerned about Ravalomanana losing credibility by continuing to announce his imminent return. He requested the Ambassador's support in

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joining Rajemison in a telephone conference with Ravalomanana to encourage him to forget the idea of returning in the near future and, instead, focus his press statements on other issues that would enable him to appear as a wise elder. Aro argued that this would help preserve Ravalomanana's image and credibility, which he would need to win an eventual election.

When pressed on what action had been or could be taken to pressure the HAT to seek an agreement with Ravalomanana, Aro indicated that the plan focused solely on convincing Ravalomanana why he should not return. He implied that Rajemison had taken no measures to alter the HAT's plans, which Aro appeared to consider as a fait accompli given the French backing. In a separate meeting on July 2, the HAT finance minister confirmed to us that the HAT was growing impatient and was pushing to move straight away to "consensual" elections without signing a transition charter and implementing a consensual transition government. How "consensual" elections could be held without a consensual entity to organize them was unclear, but we warned him clearly that a non-consensual approach would not receive international approval or support.

19. (C) Aro asserted that the French had not chosen their favored candidate yet for the elections, but were considering (increasingly) TGV himself, as well as three coastal politicians -- Roland Ratsiraka (nephew of the former president), Jacques Sylla (former National Assembly president who jumped the sinking TIM ship around the time of the coup to join the HAT), and Pierrot Rajaonarivelo (former vice prime minister and leader of AREMA exiled in France until after the coup). Although there has been much speculation here that Rajemison is positioning himself for a presidential bid, Aro said that the UN ambassador does not currently have

the intention to run and would not compete against another Merina if TGV ran.

¶10. (C) Additional biographical details: Rajemison was born January 12, 1950 in Andilamena. He is of Merina ethnicity. Prior to becoming Senate President, he served as campaign manager for Ravalomanana in 2001, and Deputy Mayor and adviser to then Mayor Ravalomanana between 1999 and 2001. He holds a degree in economics and management, and held a position in Ravalomanana's TIKO Group prior to his entry into politics in 1999. Until his forced departure for Geneva last year, he was widely seen as Ravalomanana's heir apparent.

¶11. (C) Comment: Rajemison may have a useful role to play in urging both the HAT and Ravalomanana toward consensus. Although he is estranged from Ravalomanana, he retains some level of access to him, and he clearly has access to high-level HAT leaders. However, his intentions seem focused on keeping his options open and advancing his own political career, rather than reigning in the HAT as they march forward, etching their power into stone slightly more each day. The hope of restoring a semblance of legality to the unconstitutional wreck of a Malagasy government that currently exists, so that it could organize elections that the USG might be able to recognize as legitimate, appears increasingly to be a utopian dream. SADC mediator Chissano, who made his first visit to Madagascar July 9-12, will certainly be facing an uphill battle and will have to act fast if he is to preempt the TGV train from leaving the station. End comment.
MARQUARDT